

Yakov Bunke Working On One Of The Sculptures



This is I, working on one of the sculptures, Plunge, 1970s.

In 1947 I was sent to work as an instructor of rifle department of Dosaaf [Volunteer society of assistance of Army and the Front]. I did not work there for a long time, less than a year. Then I found job in some company as a joiner. Since childhood I dreamt to become an artist. I made complex furniture, then I became a foreman and ran production. I had a chance to be creative in my work- I made carving and inlay. Since 1962 I started taking part in the competitions and was conferred with the title- people's artist. In 1983 I retired. I devoted myself to the art since then.

My private life turned out to be pretty good. I often went to ispolkom on various matters and I met the secretary there- a young Lithuanian lady -Dalya Baitkute. Dalya was divorced and raised a son born in 1947. In 1949 we met and fell in love with each other. In 1950 I married Dalya. I adopted Dalya's son Virgilius and he treats me like his own father, though he knows that I am not his natural father. In 1952 our elder son Evgeniy was born. Then in 1953 - Leonid.

My mother, sisters and their families left for Israel in 1970s. When my sisters were leaving, I also had a chance to leave, but my wife Dalya always supposed in my decisions. I had only one intention- dedicate my life to perpetuation of the Plunge Jews, who perished during the war. I made sketches a long time ago and started my work. I wanted to show the tragedy of Lithuanian Jews in Lithuanian art. I went to different organizations, ispolkom and my Dalya helped me in everything. First, I managed to get Jewish cemetery restored.

In 1956 there were 130 Jews in Plunge. Now, I am the only one. I understand that I am the last Jew in this small town with an old Jewish history. The reason why I have not left for Israel is to tell the local inhabitants about the history of their town and perpetuate the memory of my tribesmen here. I am thankful to people for tolerance and understanding. People treat me very well. I am also dealing with Lithuanian history. I do some works in Lithuanian theme as per request of the

authorities. I am a judge at children's art exhibition. I help in decoration of all events. This year their nominated me for title -the honorable citizen of Plunge.

I got the permit to create memorials of Holocaust victims, the biggest one is in Plunge. I made all sculptures myself. There are several wooden sculptures, one of them is dedicated to perished children, the other one is dedicated to my grandparents. I told the Lithuanian school about Jewish tragedy, and now Lithuanian kids regularly take care of the memorial, and keep it clean. I also installed memorable insignia in other execution places. I worked mostly on Jewish theme, made characteristic images of Jewish craftsmen, workers, characters of Shalom Aleichem.

Another matter of my life is creation of the museum of Jewish history in Plunge. I obtained the right to found the museum, got the premises. We did it with the help of my wife Dalya, my sons and friends. All kinds of people sent me exhibits of Jewish utensils. I looked for historic pictures. Now the museum is acting. Though, in postwar times we did not stick to Jewish traditions, my children grew up Jewish, even Lithuanian Vergilius.